

報告

1 分間でできる英語教育活動

Walter Carpenter

(徳島大学先端技術科学教育部国際連携教育開発センター)

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Mad Minutes! Teaching English in One Minute

Walter Carpenter

(Center for International Cooperation in Engineering Education (CICEE), Graduate School of Advanced Technology, The University of Tokushima)

Abstract : The article traces the origins, and considers the effectiveness, of an English-language speaking and listening activity, intended for use in a “communicative-approach oriented” classroom. In considering the communicative nature of the exercise presented here, the paper briefly considers some differences between how *the English language* is taught to Japanese students in Japan--and how *the Japanese language* is taught to foreigners. The exercise introduced here, Mad Minutes!, was initially developed for use in an English as Second Language (ESL) classroom in the United States. Since then, it has since been successfully used at the University of Tokushima (UT), and elsewhere, in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL), setting. A four-step plan for using Mad Minutes! is also provided near the end of the article, for the benefit of educators who may wish to use the activity in their classrooms.

(Key Words: English, communicative approach, university students, speaking, listening, classroom activity.)

1. General Introduction

In education, specifically in the field of foreign language education, there is a variety of both theoretical approaches and classroom methods for teaching secondary, or foreign, languages. This paper introduces an original classroom activity for use in teaching English to non-native English speakers--a student-centered classroom exercise that can be accurately described as “communicative” in nature. That is, rather than focusing on a “correct” choice of grammar, vocabulary and syntax, the aim of the activity is learning to use the English language for verbal communication. For, within the “communicative approach” to foreign language teaching, it is assumed that grammar, vocabulary and other language features will come into play and will be used by the speaker *while (at the same time)* verbally communicating information to the listeners, using the language being studied (the “target” language). One dictionary defines the communicative approach like this: “a method of teaching a foreign language which stresses the importance of learning to communicate

information and ideas in the language.”⁽¹⁾

The activity described in the following sections of this paper can thus be described as a foreign (or, second) language classroom exercise, intended to develop one’s communicative abilities. Or, stated another way--as with almost every activity employing a communicative approach to language teaching--the ultimate aim of Mad Minutes (the activity described in this paper) is the development of “communicative competence.”⁽²⁾

2. Teaching English and Japanese, in Japan

The vast majority of English language classes taught in Japan--English classes beginning in junior high school (middle school) and continuing on through higher education--do not use a communicative approach for teaching English. Yet, on the other hand, a communicative approach to foreign- or second-language teaching and learning is actually well known and commonly used in Japan. To illustrate this point, it is interesting to observe that, *for teaching the Japanese*

language to foreigners, the teaching methods used in Japan are typically, very similar to the communicative approach for teaching English. More specifically, two widely used series of texts used in Japanese language courses, *Shin Nihongo no Kiso* (“New Basic Japanese”) ⁽³⁾ and *Minna no Nihongo* (“Japanese for Everyone”) ⁽⁴⁾ both employ an approach that is intended to develop practical, useful, communication skills. Within these books one will discover that some memorization is required, some grammar is discussed, and some vocabulary is taught, of course. However, the stated and fundamental aim of these texts is to enable the learners to communicate, in Japanese, in “real life” settings; the goal is not to simply to pass a test, the primary goal is to learn to communicate by using the target language: Japanese.

However, sadly and unfortunately, a similar communicative-based approach is not typically used by **Japanese teachers** when teaching English to Japanese students. Indeed, the most common method used in Japan for formal English instruction at all levels of education, including higher education (university) settings, is Grammar Translation, or a style of teaching that is explicitly intended to increase standardized test scores: University entrance examinations, the TOEIC, or the STEP test, “Eiken,” for example. ⁽⁵⁾

3. Development of Mad Minutes!

Upon returning to the United States in 1999, after a one-year stint as an English language teacher in the public school system of Japan, the author of this paper began teaching English to a group of Korean university students. The students, third and fourth year undergraduates from Sogang University in Seoul, Korea, were enrolled in an intensive summer course in English, at Loyola University Chicago.

Some of the goals of the course: it should be challenging yet achievable. That is, the demands of the course should not exceed the students’ capacities.

Other goals: the contents should be interesting, fast-paced, and the classroom sessions should be oriented toward practical communication.

After a few days of teaching, using the assigned textbook, materials, and using suggested activities from the workbook, it became apparent that the students were becoming frustrated. One reason for their frustration was that the difficulty of the assigned materials and classroom activities was notably higher than the students’ capabilities.

In response to the, unforeseen and unwelcome, difficulties being experienced by the students, the author set out to develop an activity that would automatically “scale” (increase, or decrease) in difficulty based on, and according to, the ability of each student. In other words, the intention was to create one activity or exercise that would seem equally difficult to an advanced student, or to a beginning student of English; the same exercise would seem more or less equally difficult across all levels of student English proficiency.

The name of the exercise that the author created was given the title, “Mad Minutes!” In this sense, the word *Mad* pertains to the “anything goes,” freewheeling, aspect of the exercise. Nearly any topic or subject or vocabulary is acceptable for use in this exercise though, almost without exception, beginning and intermediate students will choose a topic that is familiar to them. The word *Minutes* refers to the goal of speaking, non-stop if possible, for one-minute, or sixty seconds. Finally, the deliberate and somewhat artificial use of the exclamation mark (!) not only serves a decorative purpose, it also helps to convey a sense of excitement.

4. A Description of Mad Minutes!: Questions and Answers

What is it? It is a one-minute (sixty seconds) English speaking activity; it is intended to help non-English

speakers develop experience and build confidence in speaking English quickly and fluently.

How does it work? Participants are assigned a topic. Then the speaker should stand in front of the room and speak English, trying to talk non-stop for one minute on the assigned topic.

--The speech should not be memorized previously. This is the reason why the speaker is assigned a topic for the Mad Minute speech only one or two minutes before the speech should begin.

-- During the preparation time before speaking (one or two minutes), the assigned speaker can use a dictionary or write some notes; any extra helps used by the student during this brief time period are OK.

Why the name, “Mad Minutes!”? During the one minute of speaking, **anything** that is said is OK, even if the words spoken may not be closely or obviously connected with the assigned topic. For example, if the assigned topic is “fashion,” the speaker may say anything that comes to mind, even if the words or ideas expressed are not really connected with the subject of fashion.

What is the purpose of Mad Minutes!? The goal is to help non-native speakers of English gain confidence in their ability to really speak English. The goal is speak English quickly, without stopping and without pausing, for one full minute (sixty-seconds). Once again, please note, the purpose is to speak English, without stopping. Thus, it is OK if the student does not always speak words, phrases, or ideas that are directly associated with the assigned topic.

Final Point -- Listening: The listeners should try and listen carefully to what the speaker says. After the speaker is finished, the listeners are asked to evaluate how well they understood the speaker.

The reason that the listeners are asked to write some

comments and answer some questions is to help the audience members become better listeners, to become “active listeners.” Therefore, by answering some standard questions, utilizing quick and brief written replies, it both encourages and allows the entire classroom to participate; the exercise becomes an interactive process; the audience is encouraged to consider and to improve their English listening and writing abilities.

5. Speaking and Listening

As Mad Minutes! was intentionally crafted to improve speaking but, also, listening skills. With this in mind, the instructor should ask the non-speaking students, the audience, to honestly respond to some questions, once the speaker is finished. However, the aim of answering questions is really not intended for the listening students to evaluate the speaker, the real aim is for the students to focus on and to consider their own listening skills.

Some sample questions.

The most important question the listener is asked to consider is a simple one:

1. Could you fully understand what the speaker said?
And,
2. What were the main ideas of the Mad Minute
Speech?

6. Initial Reactions from Students

As noted, the “Mad Minute” speaking and listening exercise was developed as an exercise for Korean students (studying in the USA), to improve their English speaking skills. A secondary aim of the exercise is to improve the listening skills of the audience, the students listening to the presentation. These were the aims, the goals, of the exercise but how about the students’ reactions?

At the conclusion of the summer English course, an extensive survey was administered and the students were asked to evaluate the various aspects of the program, including housing, course content, instructors,

and extra-curricular (non-academic) activities.

After the results of the survey were analyzed, the Director of the program told this author that one aspect of the program that students consistently ranked as the very best was the “Mad Minute” activity. The director said that the students really liked the activity because it was not easy, yet it was something that was within their capabilities. The director also said that similar comments were made by almost every one of the students, from each of the three language proficiency levels: the highest-level students, the lowest-level students, and those (the majority) between the highest and the lowest: all reported that the activity was unique, challenging, and well-suited to their needs and abilities.

7. Use of Mad Minutes! in a Japanese context

After earning a doctorate, the author returned to Japan in 2004 and taught English at Asia University in Musashino-shi (Tokyo) Japan. After five years of teaching at Asia University, the author came to the University of Tokushima (UT), in 2009; thus, the author has had numerous opportunities to use this exercise, in a variety of university classrooms, teaching university students in both Tokyo and in Tokushima, Japan.

More specifically, while at UT the author has used the Mad Minutes! exercise in English communication courses open to participants from the university teaching faculty, graduate students, and University staff employees. The classes were offered as part of the university development outreach activities by the Center for International Cooperation in Engineering Education (CICEE) and in cooperation with the Graduate School of Advanced Technology at UT. More recently, in February 2010, this author was able to use the exercise in a Technical English course, consisting of UT undergraduate engineering students; overall, the results were positive. The UT International students (those from countries other than Japan), in particular, enjoyed the challenge--and opportunity--to

speak English freely, without restrictions on the subject matter.

For language educators who may be interested in trying this activity in their classes, the following four-step outline is provided:

8. A four-step plan for using the Mad Minute exercise

1. The Instructor asks each student, one student at a time, to suggest a possible topic. As the student makes a suggestion, the instructor writes the suggested topic on the blackboard.
2. The Instructor allows time for all the students to prepare a one-minute presentation on the topic of their choice.
--Students are not limited to choose only the topic they suggested, they may choose any of the topics that have been written on the blackboard.
--During this time of preparation students are allowed to talk freely with one another. They also may use a dictionary or any other kind of resource material.
3. The teacher calls each student, one by one, to the front of the class. The student should try to speak, without stopping, for one full minute. Even if the student strays from the original topic choice, it is acceptable, as long as the student continues to speak English.
4. The teacher should try to, gently yet consistently, enforce the one-minute rule; no more, but no less, than one full minute (sixty seconds) of speaking time.

Finally, in connection with using this communicative-language exercise: these four steps are provided as guidelines for the English (or other language) instructor. It is certainly acceptable to adjust or modify any of the four listed steps, or to perhaps add new, or different, or additional, steps.

9. Summary and Conclusion

As might be expected, the response of students to the

Mad Minute Exercise sometimes varies widely; some students enjoy the exercise very much, while others seem to not like it at all. Undoubtedly such factors such as ability level, cultural background, motivational level, and other factors need to be considered when attempting to explain why students may not all respond in a positive manner to the exercise. Nevertheless, and despite a variance in student responses, it is important for teachers to be flexible and to have at their disposal a variety of teaching activities, methods and approaches they can use in the classroom.

Notes

- (1) The definition of **communicative approach** is found on page number three-hundred-and-four (p. 304) of the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD). Please see bibliography for more details.
- (2) The OALD (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*) defines **communicative competence** as, "a person's ability to communicate information and ideas in a foreign language." (p. 304)
- (3) The *Shin Nihongo no Kiso* series of Japanese Language textbooks were originally developed by (and continue to be published by) the Japan-based Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship (AOTS). This series is advertised as a short-term, practical, study of the Japanese language for communication.
- (4) The stated aims of the *Minna no Nihongo* series of Japanese language texts, likewise, clearly emphasize the goal of communication. The publisher states that "these books will enable the . . . learner to make simple conversation." Additionally, with further study, the publisher assures us that the learner can "become a more fluent communicator" http://www.3anet.co.jp/english/books/books_01.html
- (5) A more thorough discussion of English teaching in Japan can be found in "The Communicative Approach in a Japanese context," available at http://www.asia-u.ac.jp/cele/cele_celejournal_2009.htm. See bibliography for more details.

(5a) TOEIC is an acronym for, Test of English for International Communication. The well-known Test in Practical English Proficiency is possibly unique to Japan; it is typically referred as, "Eiken," or STEP. The test was developed by, and is administered by, the Society for Testing English Proficiency, hence the acronym, STEP. <http://stepeiken.org/>

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